DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 126 167 UD 016 113

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TITLE Black and Immigrant Children in Montreal: A Curricula Comparison.
PUB DATE Apr 76
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Association (San Francisco, California, April 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Achievement Rating; *Class Size; Comparative Analysis; Curriculum Evaluation; Curriculum Planning; Curriculum Problems; Disadvantaged Youth; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Curriculum; Immigrants; Inner City; Mathematics; *Migrant Children; Minority Group Children; *Negro Students; *Personnel Policy; Reading Tests; Standardized Tests
IDENTIFIERS *Quebec (Montreal)

ABSTRACT

Several underlying curriculum variables influencing the course of study as it is implemented in the inner city, such as class size and personnel policies, are examined in this investigation, which seeks to determine the relationship between the curriculum variables and standardized academic tests on black and immigrant children in Montreal. Information and data are obtained from ten English speaking elementary schools within the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal. Findings indicate that school board data on class size is discrepant with actual class size; that the personnel in inner city schools seem to be less experienced than noninner city schools; that both black and immigrant groups perform equally poorly on standardized reading tests; and that black children have more difficulty than immigrant children on standardized math tests. The results do not seem discrepant from other studies of lower SES schools. Once again, the problem in the skill areas is reaffirmed. The issues that remain are the following: (1) whether communities are going to make the necessary commitments of time, energy, and money to make successful intervention in schools; (2) whether this intervention will try to match the child, his culture, and instructional task; and, (3) whether learning will take place from past mistakes, or whether mistakes will be made again. (Author/AM)

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BLACK AND IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN MONTREAL:

A CURRICULA COMPARISON

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UD016113

Paper presented at the 60th Annual Convention of the American Education Research Association, San Francisco, April, 1976.

BLACK AND IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN MONTREAL: A CURRICULA COMPARISON

Much has been written about the educational plight of the black inner city child (i.e. Clark, 1963; Deutsch et al, 1971; Fischer, 1968; Little and Smith, 1971; Miller, 1967; Riessman, 1962; Silberman, 1967; Weinberg, 1972), the Spanish speaking child (i.e. Carter, 1970; Manuel, 1965; Sexton, 1965) and the migrant child (Haney, 1967) in the American school system. Few researchers have investigated the educational problems and trends of the black and immigrant communities (most notably Greeks, Chinese, Portugese) in Canada. While several studies have investigated the approriateness of the inner city curriculum (Derevensky & Mitchell, 1974) in Montreal, and the immigrant problem (Ashworth, 1975; Bhatnagar, 1975; Mowart & St. Lawrence, 1969) in general, the present study attempted to look at several underlying curriculum variables influencing the course of study as it is implemented in the inner city and to determine whether differences exist between the schools serving the black and immigrant communities. More specifically, the present study examined such variables as class size, and personnel policies as they relate to academic curricula.

Method

Information and data were obtained from ten English-speaking elementary schools within the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (PSBGM). All schools had been delineated as inner city schools and varied in the size and composition of their population. Five of the schools were primarily composed of immigrant children (Greek, Chinese and Portugese), two representing the black community and the remaining three schools consisted of second and third

generation Canadian children from low socio-economic areas. Information was obtained through teacher interviews, personnel records and responses to a questionnaire. A questionnaire which dealt with biographical data, aspects of the curriculum, support services and instructional methods was distributed to all classroom teachers in inner schools. One hundred and nine (47%) completed questionnaires were received. Interviews regarding curriculum matters were conducted with principals, the Black liason officer, the Greek liason officer, assistant principals, curriculum consultants, coordinators of programs, and School Board personnel responsible for policy decisions in inner city schools. The results of the Reading and Mathematics subtests of the Stanford Achievement Test were obtained through School Board Records.

Results

Schools within the black community were found to have the lowest teacher-pupil classroom ratio (22.3:1) with no significant differences between schools within the immigrant community (28:1) and low SES whites (26.9:1). A significant difference between actual classroom ratios ($\bar{x}$ = 26.4:1) and official school board ratios ($\bar{x}$ = 20.7:1) was found (t = 5.28, df = 18, $p < .001$) within all inner city schools. The greatest discrepancies between actual classroom and official classroom ratios were found in schools within the black community.

Principals in black schools were found to have the least amount of administrative experience with those in immigrant schools having the most administrative experience within the inner city. In addition, principals in all inner city schools tend to have less administrative experience ($\bar{x}$ = 4.8 years) when matched with high SES schools ($\bar{x}$ = 6.5 years). While more teachers have probationary status (less than two years teaching experience) in the black community schools (approximately 30 percent) as

compared with schools in the immigrant community (20 percent) and low SES community (20 percent), in general, teachers in schools in the black community tend to have the most teaching experience of all inner city schools. However, when compared to teachers outside the inner city, teachers in middle class schools have significantly more teaching experience ($t = 3.75$, df = $p < .01$) and less number of probationary teachers ($x^2 = 3.93$, df = 1, $p < .05$).

No significant differences were found between the black and immigrant students performance scores on the Reading subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test. However, it should be noted that at the grade four and six level, approximately 85 percent of the black children, 87 percent of the immigrant children and 68 percent of the low SES white children achieved reading scores below grade level.

The results on the Mathematics subtest of the Stanford Achievement Test administered at the grade four and six level revealed that the low SES Canadian children had the highest Mathematics scores (47 percent on or above grade level) within the inner city. Further analysis revealed that immigrant children performed superior (32 percent on or above grade level) on the Mathematics subtest to black children (9 percent on or above grade level).

Discussion

Within the inner city, the educational components essential for academic success are indeed complex. There is little argument that a multitude of factors can and do affect the academic climate, the learning environment and the success rate of inner city children. While no inner city school truly represents a homogeneous population, the inner city within Montreal and many Canadian cities represents a wide heterogeneous mixture of

many cultural and ethnic minorities.

The role of the teacher and principal in inner city schools is exceedingly difficult. Children in inner city schools tend to make greater academic and non-academic demands on teachers, who in turn require more administrative support. Small differences were found concerning the amount of teaching and administrative experience amongst the black and immigrant schools, however, teachers and principals outside the inner city have significantly more teaching and administrative experience than those within the inner city. Since a large proportion of students within inner city schools are retarded in their academic skills, an experienced and stable staff can best be able to select an appropriate curriculum which can ensure a "proper match" between materials and activities and the child's developmental level.

Within the inner city, black schools appear, on the surface, to have some advantages. They have the lowest teacher-pupil classroom ratio and teachers having the most teaching experience. Yet, principals in black schools tend to have the least amount of administrative experience and a greater proportion of teachers (approximately 30 percent) have less than two years teaching experience (probationary status). Schools within the black community often have many experienced and teachers new to the profession, with few having four or five years of experience. Black students were found to have the lowest mathematics achievement scores (91 percent below grade level) and reading achievement scores (85 percent below grade level) amongst all the inner city schools. In contrast, the low SES white population appears to be the most "advantaged" with 68 percent of students scoring below grade level in Reading and 53 percent scoring below grade level in Mathematics.

While the particular teaching strategies and methods that are most successful with particular inner city children often tend to be similar to those used in other schools, their applications may differ. An essential prerequisite for the development and implementation of successful strategies for upgrading scholastic attainment is the analysis of the learner's needs. It is this ability in conjunction with an indepth understanding of the child's environment, the dissonances between his self-expectations and school tasks, and the child-rearing practices of the immigrant group that contribute to effective instruction.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to report on findings that explored the relationship between underlying curriculum variables and standardized academic tests on black and immigrant children in Montreal.

We found that school board data on class size seemed to be discrepant with actual class size; that the personnel in inner city schools seemed to be less experienced than non inner city schools; that both black and immigrant groups perform equally poorly on standardized reading tests and that black children have more difficulty than immigrant children on standardized math tests.

These results do not seem discrepant from other studies of lower SES schools. Once again, we reaffirm there is a problem in the skill areas. Once again, we reaffirm that teachers and administrators leave the inner city whenever possible. Once again, we find that stated district policy (i.e. class size) does not match with the actual classroom situation. The issues for us are: 1) are communities going to make the necessary commitments of time, energy and money to make successful intervention in schools?

2) will this intervention try to match the child, his culture and instructional task? and 3) will we learn from our past mistakes or make them once again?

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